

island lies midway between Europe and Africa. It inherited the traditions of Islamic civilisation—of which it was one of the last European refuges—as well as of Latin culture; its inhabitants—many of whom were Jews—were from necessity skilled navigators, as much at home on the high seas as in their own sea-girt birthplace. In consequence, they were considered to be familiar in an unrivalled degree with the art of navigation, the configuration of the coasts, and geographical knowledge in general as it then existed. By degrees, their reputation extended. In the end, they came to be the cartographers *par excellence* of Christendom, application being made to them on all occasions when new maps were required—more especially, of course, by the princes and rulers of the Spanish mainland. Their productions may be said to sum up geographical science so far as it was known in the later Middle Ages, and to have served as the point of departure for subsequent extensions of knowledge.

So much is more or less familiar. But what is not so generally realised is the fact that these Majorcan cartographers, upon whom Europe relied for its geographical knowledge, were for the most part Jews. At their head was the Crescas family. Abraham Crescas was so highly esteemed that he was appointed by the Infant Juan of Aragon as "Master of Maps and Compasses", a dignity for which he was paid, apparently, by an authorisation to establish a public bath for his co-religionists at Palma.

On one occasion the Infant Juan of Aragon wrote to the authorities on the island stating that he wanted a chart which would represent the Straits of Gibraltar, the Atlantic coasts and the mysterious ocean beyond, in the most complete manner possible. It was natural that the task was entrusted to Abraham Crescas and his son Jahuda. They worked on it for two years (1376-7): and the result was their famous *mapamundi* —"that is to